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REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RESOLUTION 1078 (1996)

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In paragraph 10 of its resolution 1078 (1996) of 9 November 1996, the Security Council requested the Secretary-General, in consultation with his Special Envoy, the Humanitarian Coordinator for the Great Lakes Region, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the Special Envoy of the European Union (EU) and the States concerned, to draw up a concept of operations and framework for a humanitarian task force.

2. During the past few weeks, and in particular since 15 November, the situation in eastern Zaire, Rwanda and Burundi has changed rapidly and dramatically. In view of this sudden transformation, it may be useful for the Council to receive a detailed account of recent events there, in which political, military and humanitarian aspects are closely interlinked. For the same reason, it is difficult at the present stage to provide the Council with a comprehensive concept of operations for a humanitarian task force. Indeed, it is still unclear what the scope of such a force's tasks would be, especially when the nature, strength and modus operandi of the multinational force to be established under resolution 1080 (1996) of 15 November 1996 have yet to be finalized.

3. The present report is based on information available to the Secretariat up to 26 November 1996.

II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

The situation in Zaire

4. Since September 1996, the situation in eastern Zaire has undergone a sharp transformation. Fighting between the Zairian Army and the rebels intensified and resulted in the rebels' takeover, by 4 November 1996, of the towns of Uvira, Bukavu and Goma. The fighting caused a massive movement of over a million Rwandan and Burundian refugees who needed urgent humanitarian relief. Greatly concerned by these developments, the Secretary-General wrote to the President of

the Security Council on 14 and 24 October (S/1996/875 and S/1996/878) and personally briefed the Council on 25 October and 8 November. He has also been in constant touch with the Heads of State of the countries of the region and with the current Chairman, President Paul Biya of the Republic of Cameroon, and the Secretary-General of OAU.

5. On 4 November 1996, the leader of the rebel group that calls itself the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (ADFL), Mr. Laurent-Désiré Kabila, announced a unilateral ceasefire. On 10 November, he promised to open a humanitarian corridor for refugees and relief organizations. However, he warned that any humanitarian organizations wishing to operate in what he called "liberated zones" had to deal with the ADFL. He added that, if an international force did not intervene quickly, his forces would attack Mugunga refugee camp, from which, he claimed, Goma had been shelled on 9 and 10 November.

6. Reacting to that statement, on 10 November the Zairian Minister of Information warned international organizations not to deal with or support the rebels, otherwise the Government could withdraw their right to work inside Zaire. The divergent positions of the rebels and of the Government of Zaire on this issue have made negotiations regarding humanitarian corridors and the return of aid agencies, whose relocation the Secretary-General had reluctantly authorized earlier, to eastern Zaire extremely difficult.

United Nations Special Envoys

7. During the early stages of the conflict between the rebels and the Zairian Army in South Kivu, the Secretary-General twice sent a Special Envoy, Mr. Ibrahima Fall, to the region for fact-finding purposes. His first mission took place on 22 and 23 September 1996 after the Zairian authorities had accused the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and several non-governmental organizations of providing assistance to the Banyamulenge. The Special Envoy was able to establish that these accusations were unfounded and his visit helped to reduce the tension between the Zairian authorities and UNHCR. The purpose of his second mission, from 18 to 24 October, was, if possible, to identify courses of action that could help control or resolve the conflict. On 30 October, Mr. Fall gave the members of the Security Council an oral briefing on the situation in the Great Lakes region. Mrs. Sadako Ogata, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, also briefed the Council on 25 October.

8. On 29 October, the Secretary-General again wrote to the President of the Council (S/1996/888), informing him that he had decided to appoint Mr. Raymond Chrétien (Canada) as his Special Envoy for the Great Lakes region. The Special Envoy's tasks would be threefold: to consult with all concerned in order to establish the facts relating to the present conflicts and to develop plans for defusing the tension and establishing a ceasefire and a process of negotiations; to explore the possibilities for the early convening of a regional conference; and to present the Secretary-General with advice on the mandate to be given to a special representative whom he might appoint for the region and on the size and structure of the United Nations political presence that, in

consultation with the Governments concerned, would be established in the Great Lakes region.

9. On 30 October 1996, a technical mission of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, led by Assistant Secretary-General Behrooz Sadry, arrived in Kinshasa to discuss with the Government of Zaire the possible deployment of United Nations observers, pursuant to paragraph 7 of Security Council resolution 1053 (1996). Given the deterioration of the situation in eastern Zaire and the fact that it was physically impossible for the technical mission to proceed to eastern Zaire at that time, the Secretary-General instructed Mr. Sadry to prepare the way for the Chrétien mission. Accordingly, Mr. Sadry met with the Prime Minister and other government Ministers for this purpose, as well as with members of the Kinshasa diplomatic corps and the Special Envoy of EU.

10. The Special Envoy of the Secretary-General arrived in Kinshasa on 8 November 1996, having first called on President Mobutu Sese Seko of the Republic of Zaire in the south of France. Since then he has been shuttling between the capitals of the subregion in a continuous effort to obtain the various parties' agreement to a number of measures that need to be taken if this complex crisis is to be controlled and resolved. These measures include an end to the fighting, an easing of tension between the States of the subregion, the voluntary and orderly return of refugees to Rwanda and Burundi and the initiation of a negotiating process that could lead to the convening of a regional or international conference. At the same time the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, in close collaboration with the Humanitarian Coordinator for the Great Lakes Region, has worked intensively to help create conditions for the speedy delivery of humanitarian relief to refugees and displaced persons. His interlocutors have also raised with him issues related to the deployment of an international force in eastern Zaire, especially since the adoption of resolutions 1078 (1996) and 1080 (1996) on 9 and 15 November, respectively.

11. At the time of writing, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General has paid one or more visits to the capitals of Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zaire and has had extensive conversations on all aspects of his mandate with the leaders of those countries, with Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, with the Secretary-General of OAU and with a number of other international personalities who have been contributing to the international search for ways to restore peace and security and to address the enormous humanitarian problems in the subregion. The Special Envoy will complete his mission about 10 December and will then return to New York to brief the Secretary-General and the Security Council on his findings.

12. The Special Envoy's first consultations with Rwandan and Zairian leaders confirmed the differences in their view of the situation. The Rwandan leaders stated that their country was not in a state of war with Zaire and that Rwandan forces were not involved in the hostilities in eastern Zaire. They were willing to meet with the Zairian authorities, provided the time and the place of the meeting were acceptable to both sides. They reaffirmed that Rwanda was willing to facilitate the voluntary return of refugees. They also stated that a multinational force should have a strictly humanitarian mandate. On 11 November, during their talks with a delegation of EU, they agreed to open the country's borders with Zaire for humanitarian aid.

13. On the other hand, the Zairian leaders considered Zaire to be at war with Rwanda, conveying to the Special Envoy their demands for an official ceasefire and the withdrawal of the Rwandan forces, which, they alleged, were occupying Zairian territory. They also suggested a high-level meeting between the leaderships of the two countries.

Deployment of an international force in eastern Zaire

14. On 5 November, at the invitation of President Daniel T. Arap Moi of the Republic of Kenya, the Presidents of Eritrea, Rwanda, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia, together with the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, the Foreign Minister of Cameroon (representing the current Chairman of OAU), the Secretary-General of OAU and Mwalimu Julius Nyerere met in Nairobi to deliberate on the conflict in eastern Zaire. The Government of Zaire was invited but did not attend. In a statement issued at the end of the meeting, the summit agreed that an immediate ceasefire should be strictly observed; reaffirmed its commitment to the territorial integrity of Zaire; called for non-intervention and an end to cross-border incursions; reaffirmed the inalienable rights of all people as stipulated in international conventions relevant to the right of citizenship and nationality; called for the immediate setting up of safe corridors and temporary sanctuaries inside Zaire to facilitate humanitarian assistance and the repatriation of refugees; called for the implementation of the long-standing decision to separate the intimidators (i.e. the ex-Rwandese Armed Forces personnel and the extremist Hutu militias) and bona fide refugees; requested the Security Council to deploy a neutral force; and reaffirmed the readiness of the subregion to make its own contribution to this effort.

15. On 7 November, the Secretary-General wrote again to the President of the Security Council (S/1996/916). In both that letter and his briefing on 8 November, the Secretary-General suggested that the best response to the humanitarian crisis in eastern Zaire would be for those Member States which possessed the necessary capacity to take the lead in putting together a multinational force and to seek the Security Council's authorization for its deployment. The mandate of such a force would be to ensure the minimum security necessary to permit stabilization of the situation and enable civilian agencies to bring relief to the refugees and start preparing for their repatriation.

16. On 11 November, the 17-member Central Organ of the OAU Mechanism for the Prevention, Management and Resolution of Conflict met in Addis Ababa to discuss the crisis. A statement issued after the meeting called on the Security Council to authorize immediately the rapid deployment of a neutral force to provide humanitarian assistance to refugees, as well as to ensure their return to Rwanda, and stressed that African participation in such a force was pivotal. The statement also asked the Security Council and the international community to take measures to ensure that the necessary financial, logistical and material resources to support the participation of African countries were provided on a reliable and lasting basis.

17. On 12 November, President Mobutu met in southern France with South African Vice-President Thabo Mbeki and, on 14 November, with the Foreign Ministers of the United Republic of Tanzania, Kenya and Ethiopia. President Mobutu reportedly urged the establishment of secure corridors for the supply of

humanitarian assistance and the return of refugees. The Special Envoy of the Secretary-General had received a similar request from Prime Minister Kengo wa Dondo in Kinshasa.

18. The Security Council kept under continuing consideration the deteriorating situation in eastern Zaire and adopted resolutions 1078 (1996) and 1080 (1996).

III. THE HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

19. The situation in eastern Zaire remains extremely volatile. The large-scale movement of refugees across the Rwandan border that began on 15 November has significantly changed the humanitarian landscape, but population movements in the Great Lakes region are far from over. At the time of finalizing the present report, it was extremely difficult to estimate with any degree of precision the magnitude and implications of the continuing population flows into Rwanda and within eastern Zaire.

Overview of recent developments

20. There were 1.24 million refugees in eastern Zaire before the recent conflict, 1.1 million of whom were Rwandan and the others Burundian. These figures are based on past verifications and on the UNHCR/World Food Programme (WFP) food assessment mission undertaken last October in North Kivu, in which EU and the United States Government participated as observers. While the situation keeps fluctuating, it was roughly as follows on 25 November 1996:

(a) An estimated 500,000 Rwandan refugees have returned to their country since 15 November;

(b) According to earlier estimates of UNHCR, over 700,000 refugees remained in Zaire. More recent estimates put the number between 300,000 and 700,000. Reports indicate groups of people in several large new concentrations, including at locations south of Uvira, south-west of Bukavu, north-west of Bukavu, between Bukavu and Goma and north-west of Goma. It is assumed that the majority of these persons are from the refugee camps, but there are likely to be displaced Zairians among them and significant numbers of displaced Zairians elsewhere;

(c) So far 36,000 Burundian refugees have returned to their country from the Uvira region of Zaire;

(d) There have been considerable new influxes from eastern Zaire into Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia. They involve mostly Zairian nationals, but also include Rwandan and Burundian refugees;

(e) The United Republic of Tanzania continues to host 535,000 Rwandan refugees and has faced an additional influx of 49,000 refugees from Burundi since 1 November.

Rwanda

21. In Rwanda, the sudden mass return of refugees from Zaire was a welcome, if unexpected, development, which broke the deadlock that had prevailed since mid-1994 and eased the humanitarian crisis caused by recent fighting in North and South Kivu. In a matter of hours, an unabated stream of refugees poured into Rwanda through the Goma-Gisenyi border crossing, stretching to their limits the reception, transit relief and transportation capacity of the Government of Rwanda and international organizations. The Government of Rwanda has cooperated in facilitating the processing and onward movement of some 500,000 returnees so far. The Secretary-General commends international organizations for their coordinated effort at meeting this major humanitarian challenge. This sudden and massive repatriation of Rwandan refugees from Zaire has generated a momentum the Government of Rwanda can use to promote national reconciliation and the easing of tension and insecurity in eastern Zaire. Rwanda will need assistance from the international community. In accordance with a request by the Government, returnees will be provided not only with transportation and standardized return packages but also with food security for a period of six months from WFP and with a variety of other types of assistance by UNHCR aimed at promoting their reintegration, ranging from shelter projects to activities in support of vulnerable groups, women in particular.

22. As part of an overall effort planned and coordinated by the Government of Rwanda and under the lead of the United Nations Resident Coordinator, inter-agency plans involving the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), WFP, UNHCR, other United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations are being developed in order to ensure that a long-term community-based rehabilitation and development strategy is devised and implemented from the early stages of the repatriation movement. It is crucial that a simultaneous, rather than a sequential, approach be followed towards short-term reintegration assistance and long-term rehabilitation and developmental aid. In this regard, the informal donor meeting of refugee reintegration in the Great Lakes region of Africa held on 23 November 1996 at Geneva at the initiative of the Government of Canada was extremely important.

23. Healing the traumas of war, genocide and suffering in exile will be an enormous challenge. If reconciliation is to have a chance, the people of Rwanda must reach agreement on building an inclusive society and for the wounds of genocide to heal there must be justice. In coping with local tensions that may emerge as a result of this sudden influx of returnees, the Government of Rwanda will also require international support in strengthening its system of justice, especially at the commune level. In particular, the United Nations Human Rights Field Operation in Rwanda deployed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights will require secured funding in order to increase the number of its monitors in Rwanda. Other agencies will also continue to assist the Rwandan judiciary through institution-rebuilding projects intended, in particular, to facilitate the early implementation of the recently adopted Genocide Law, which, in turn, should help reduce the number of detainees awaiting trial, who are currently estimated at some 85,000.

Burundi

24. In Burundi, some 36,000 refugees repatriated from Zaire, mainly from the Uvira region. In fact, the insurgents in South Kivu are said to have organized their return to Burundi and to have brutalized, and allegedly even killed, a number of male refugees, mostly before they crossed the border.

25. On the Burundian side, the main concern of the Secretary-General is the safety of people returning to troubled areas, especially Cibitoke province, where according to recently confirmed reports 300 returnees were massacred in a church on 27 October. After a number of démarches, UNHCR gained access to the border areas for assistance and protection purposes. Following intensive discussions between the Regional Humanitarian Coordinator, the UNHCR Special Envoy and the Government of Burundi, the authorities promised every possible effort to ensure the security of returnees. This may include the temporary regrouping of returnees in some areas, if possible close to their own villages. This solution may still be better than facing the dangers of conflict and hunger in eastern Zaire. However, as a matter of priority it must be combined with assured safe access for humanitarian staff and human rights observers. The international presence in Burundi must therefore be enhanced. At present, there are only five human rights monitors stationed in the entire country. The Government of Burundi has welcomed the plan of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to increase their number to 35 as soon as the necessary resources are made available to him.

26. The problem of returnees in Burundi is further compounded by the large number of internally displaced persons, said to number some half a million, to whom only a modest level of assistance is being provided.

Zaire

27. As for Zaire, the return of a significant number of Rwandan and Burundian refugees to their countries is undoubtedly a positive development. The policy of the Government of Zaire has been that refugees must repatriate and international assistance should no longer be made available in Zaire but in their countries of origin. The presence of refugees in North and South Kivu was considered a threat both to internal stability and to security along Zaire's borders with Burundi and Rwanda. In this connection, the Secretary-General wishes to pay tribute to the Government of Zaire, which over the past two and a half years has carried the major burden in hosting the largest number of refugees in the subregion.

28. However, as at 25 November, up to 700,000 Rwandan and Burundian refugees and displaced Zairians are believed to remain in eastern Zaire. Despite improved access to areas close to Goma and Bukavu and missions to Kisangani and Walakali, United Nations agencies have so far been unable to re-establish contact with these populations, assess their numbers and their conditions accurately or provide them with life-sustaining assistance. Access to and protection of refugees, internally displaced persons and local affected populations in eastern Zaire thus remain cause for very grave concern.

29. Reference has already been made to the elements of the former Rwandese Armed Forces and extremist militias who are still believed to be at large in Zaire. Measures will have to be agreed upon to determine how many will continue to qualify for refugee status and what solution can be found for them, pending their repatriation. International protection and assistance will no longer be available for those who do not qualify for refugee status or who, for other reasons, may be excluded from the statute of UNHCR or from the protection of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and/or of the 1969 OAU Convention Governing Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. Among these people there may be persons who fall within the competence of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and who will have to be dealt with accordingly.

30. A large and as yet undetermined number of Zairian nationals have been displaced as a result of recent fighting. In its resolutions 1078 (1996) and 1080 (1996), the Security Council recognized the plight of this category of victims of the conflict. International organizations will, in collaboration with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), cooperate with the Government of Zaire in extending to them material assistance and the necessary protection, in returning them to their homes, security conditions permitting, and in rehabilitating them.

31. It is also extremely important that international assistance should be resumed for the rehabilitation of the infrastructure and the environment in areas of North and South Kivu affected by the previous presence of refugee populations.

United Republic of Tanzania

32. As at 27 November 1996, the United Republic of Tanzania hosted a total of 756,000 refugees, including 535,000 Rwandans, 189,000 Burundians and 30,700 Zairians. UNHCR has been assisting the Government in the formulation of a plan to facilitate their voluntary return. It is hoped that recent large-scale returns from Zaire will encourage the refugee population in the United Republic of Tanzania to do so as well and that their repatriation will be carried out in an organized and phased manner, so as not to overstretch the absorption capacity of the Government of Rwanda. Meanwhile, UNHCR, UNDP and other agencies are reinforcing their infrastructure repair and environmental rehabilitation activities in the Ngara and Kagera provinces.

33. As regards the Burundian refugee population, direct arrivals from Burundi had been increasing since early 1996, but the number of arrivals since 1 November 1996 has reached 49,000. As a result of the recent hostilities in South Kivu, some Burundian refugees are believed to have crossed Lake Tanganyika from the Zairian shore and to have sought asylum in the United Republic of Tanzania. In the prevailing circumstances in Burundi, only volunteers should be repatriated to Burundi. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Secretary-General appeal to the United Republic of Tanzania and to Zaire to continue to extend asylum to this category of persons in keeping with their countries' long-standing tradition of hospitality to persons in need of international protection. The Secretary-General pays tribute to both these

Governments for what they have already done so generously in response to this appeal.

34. The Secretary-General also wishes to express his gratitude to the Governments of Kenya and Uganda for the logistical facilities that they have continued to extend to humanitarian agencies since the beginning of the current crisis in eastern Zaire.

Humanitarian response to the current situation

35. Prior to the current crisis, individual United Nations agencies, in particular, UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO), had undertaken extensive emergency preparedness measures and stockpiled food and other relief commodities in the region. At the same time, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and donor Governments agreed to the need for an improved overall policy, programme cohesion and a coordination mechanism. On 6 November, after consulting with concerned agencies, the Secretary-General decided to appoint Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, Assistant High Commissioner for Refugees, as Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Great Lakes Region and Mr. Martin Griffiths, Director, Department of Humanitarian Affairs, Geneva, as the Deputy Regional Humanitarian Coordinator, pending the receipt of his Special Envoy's recommendations on longer-term arrangements for the coordination of United Nations efforts in the area.

36. To carry out his responsibilities, the Regional Humanitarian Coordinator has been working closely with the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, as well as remaining in regular contact with government representatives and concerned authorities and maintaining close contact with the Special Envoys of the United States, EU and other actors in the region. He will also establish an appropriate mechanism for liaison with the multinational force as and when it is set up, as authorized by the Security Council in its resolutions 1078 (1996) and 1080 (1996). The Regional Coordinator will act as an advocate and facilitator to ensure the coherence of the overall humanitarian effort in the Great Lakes region. At present, however, the immediate needs are to secure access to those affected by the current conflict, to stabilize their condition and to ensure that relief agencies can provide emergency assistance and support repatriation programmes in a well-coordinated manner. Non-governmental organizations and other operational humanitarian organizations will be strongly encouraged to participate in the coordination mechanism of the United Nations system, regardless of their funding sources.

37. Humanitarian agencies are currently permitted only very limited access to the areas of displacement in eastern Zaire. This denies them a basis for detailed programming. Nor, given the security situation in the area, can any detailed assessments be undertaken at this time. At the same time, the plight of the affected population does not permit further delay in the mobilization of funds and the deployment of assistance. This must be provided through the most suitable and expeditious routes of access. The great majority of the humanitarian agencies believe that these conditions can be fulfilled only if the multinational force is deployed in a way that will ensure them the access they need and provide the necessary security for the transportation and distribution

of relief supplies. They are concerned at the delays that have taken place and at indications that the mandate of the force may fall short of what was originally envisaged when resolutions 1078 (1996) and 1080 (1996) were adopted.

38. Meanwhile, the complexity of the situation and the continuing uncertainties in the region oblige the humanitarian organizations to adopt a high degree of flexibility in programming and in such implementation as is currently possible. They are, however, proceeding on the assumption that:

(a) Emergency relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts will shift to areas inside Rwanda to a much greater extent than hitherto anticipated;

(b) The geographical area in which humanitarian assistance needs will have to be addressed is likely to be much wider than hitherto anticipated, extending westward into the interior of Zaire.

39. On 18 November, the Secretary-General launched a flash appeal requesting the international community to contribute $259.4 million to address the most immediate requirements in food, health, nutrition, water and sanitation, agriculture, coordination, logistics and communications in eastern Zaire and Rwanda. The appeal is for a three-month period and will be followed by a one-year inter-agency consolidated appeal to be launched in late January 1997. The flash appeal takes into account the 1996 inter-agency consolidated resource mobilization document, for which 80.6 per cent of funds had been received as at 4 November and from which initial stocks of supplies, material and equipment were purchased and the hiring of a number of staff was made possible to address the immediate situation. The Secretary-General is encouraged that nearly 30 per cent of this amount has been pledged so far.

40. The sudden and unexpected return puts a strain on two other aspects of assistance. The United Nations Human Rights Field Operation in Rwanda has a current strength of 107 human rights observers. It is of great importance that this should be quickly raised to the planned strength of 200 observers in order to cover larger areas of the country to which refugees are currently returning. It is estimated that by January 1997 an additional 100 human rights observers will also be required. The second issue concerns the transport of returnees from the border to their places of origin. Funds for this purpose will be required faster than initially anticipated. United Nations agencies are likely to need to call upon additional staff to assist with their respective programmes. One possible source will be the United Nations Volunteers programme, which has already provided valuable assistance in the Great Lakes region.

IV. PREPARATION OF A HUMANITARIAN TASK FORCE

41. As of the date of the present report, the nature, strength, composition, mandate and modus operandi of the multinational force envisaged under resolutions 1078 (1996) and 1080 (1996) are still under consideration by the Member States concerned. As long as the Member States involved in the discussions have not taken a final decision on all these matters, it would not be possible for the Secretary-General to present to the Council a detailed

concept of operations for the proposed follow-on humanitarian task force. The situation since the adoption of the relevant resolutions by the Council has changed substantially and is still evolving rapidly. The mandate, structure and composition of the proposed humanitarian task force will depend, inter alia, on the tasks that the multinational force, if and when deployed, will have accomplished at the time of transition, the tasks that will remain to be carried out, the logistic support that the Member States participating in the multinational force will be prepared to transfer to the successor mission and the number of Member States that, having contributed contingents to the multinational force, will choose to continue to contribute to the humanitarian task force.

V. OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

42. Seldom have humanitarian problems been so closely intertwined with historical, political, sociological and legal considerations as in the Great Lakes region. As a result of the recent outbreak of military activity in North and South Kivu, the humanitarian situation is undergoing dramatic changes and is likely to continue to evolve rapidly in the coming weeks.

43. On the basis of the experience of the past two years, the international community has come to recognize that the presence of more than one million refugees on the borders of their country of origin constitutes a serious destabilizing factor for the entire region. The present situation in eastern Zaire, in all its complexity, may offer the international community a unique opportunity to address the roots of the problem that led to the establishment and perpetuation of the refugee camps there. This opportunity must not be missed, nor must the immediate humanitarian emergency be neglected. Hundreds of thousands of refugees have already returned to Rwanda and that is a most welcome development. However, hundreds of thousands more, in addition to large numbers of internally displaced Zairians, are still scattered in eastern Zaire without access to help from the international community. That must be our first priority. There must be no return to the status quo ante and above all no re-creation of the refugee camps in eastern Zaire. But we must at the same time work both on the smooth reintegration of returnees into their home communities and on a longer-term solution to the deep-rooted problems that turned them into refugees in the first place.

44. Advantage must therefore be taken of the recent events to encourage and assist bona fide refugees to return to their countries of origin and to make this possible in practical terms. The refugees must be assured that their repatriation will be carried out voluntarily, in safety and dignity and without the threat of extralegal reprisals. They must also be offered the prospect of reintegration into their country's economic and social life. This will involve initial rehabilitation, security, restoration of the returnees' property and community development.

45. The cooperation of the Government of Rwanda will be of special importance. What Rwanda needs at this time is a new beginning and a process of genuine reconciliation in which the legitimate interests of all Rwandan citizens are adequately protected, so that they can work in harmony towards the social and

economic reconstruction of their country. The strengthening of the existing United Nations Human Rights Field Operation in Rwanda, as proposed above, will contribute to this process by inspiring confidence in the returnees and in the donor community.

46. However, the immediate concern of the Secretary-General is the fact that hundreds of thousands of men, women and children are still facing hunger, disease and violent death, most of them scattered in inaccessible and inhospitable areas of eastern Zaire beyond the reach of those who can bring them help. Neither the United Nations system nor the non-governmental organization community have the capacity in such conditions to secure access to the refugees and displaced persons and to deliver to them the relief they need with the necessary speed. This is why the Secretary-General believes that a practical way to avoid a humanitarian disaster is the establishment of some form of military presence in the region.

47. As regards the political issues that underlie this humanitarian crisis, it may be necessary for the United Nations to increase its presence in the subregion, with the consent of the Governments concerned, in order to enhance its capacity to assist those Governments, if they so wish, in managing and resolving the complex of problems that are currently so threatening to their internal cohesion and to their relations with each other. As already mentioned, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General has been asked to address this question and to make recommendations regarding the role of the United Nations in the subregion and the nature and structure of its future presence there.

48. The Secretary-General has asked his Special Envoy, Ambassador Chrétien, who has been to South Africa to consult with President Nelson Mandela, to proceed to Cameroon to consult with President Paul Biya in his capacity as current Chairman of OAU. The Special Envoy has kept in close touch with the leaders of the region, with the Secretary-General of OAU and with the special representatives of other organizations and countries. One of his objectives has been to promote a direct dialogue between the leaders of Zaire and Rwanda, since the relationship between these two countries is crucial to the stability in the entire region. The Special Envoy of the Secretary-General has also held consultations regarding the proposal for an international conference on the Great Lakes region, which has been supported by the Security Council in several resolutions and presidential statements. As indicated earlier in the present report, the Special Envoy is expected to return to New York around 10 December 1996. The Secretary-General will report to the Council thereafter on his findings and recommendations.